Prairieland shooter convicted of attempted murder, others on lesser charges in 'antifa' trial

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Nine people are on trial this week in what could be the first-ever federal terrorism case associated with “antifa.” From top left: Savanna Batten, Meagan Morris, Daniel Sanchez Estrada, Elizabeth (left) and Ines Soto, Zachary Evetts, Autumn Hill (left), Maricela Rueda, Benjamin Song (left).

In an unprecedented trial seeking to tie alleged “antifa” members to domestic terrorism, a federal jury returned a mixed verdict for nine people accused in a nonfatal July 4 shooting of a police officer outside the Prairieland immigration detention center — including a conviction on one count of attempted murder for shooter Benjamin Song.

Song, Autumn Hill, Zachary Evetts, Savanna Batten, Meagan Morris, Maricela Rueda, Elizabeth Soto and Ines Soto were convicted of rioting, providing material support to terrorists, conspiracy to use and carry an explosive, and use and carry of an explosive — the explosive being fireworks.

Daniel Sanchez Estrada was convicted of corruptly concealing a document or record. He and his wife, Rueda, were also convicted of conspiracy to conceal documents.

Song was also convicted on three counts of discharging a firearm. Hill, Evetts, Morris and Rueda were acquitted of the attempted murder and discharging a firearm charges, which they faced for allegedly aiding and abetting Song.

All nine were accused of playing a role in the nonfatal shooting of Alvarado Police Lt. Thomas Gross outside the ICE facility. Prosecutors argued the group was a "North Texas antifa cell" that shared anti-ICE and anti-government beliefs.

The defendants argued the protest was supposed to be a peaceful noise demonstration in support of the immigrants inside the detention center, and that they never intended for things to get violent.

At least two jurors were visibly distraught before Judge Mark Pittman read the verdict. Families and friends of the defendants let out muffled sobs as the decision came down.

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Families and supporters leave the federal courthouse after the verdict in the Prairieland ICE shooting trial Friday, March 13, 2026, in Fort Worth. Benjamin Song, the gunman in the nonfatal July 4 shooting of a police officer outside Prairieland detention center, was convicted of attempted murder. Other defendants were convicted on lesser charges.

Lydia Koza, Hill's wife, wore her blue patterned wedding dress to court. She told reporters afterward this case didn't show the America she believed in.

"Federal prosecutors in this case told a panel of Northern District of Texas residents with a straight face that lighting off fireworks on the Fourth of July was terrorism, was a riot," Koza said. "I cannot think of anything more un-American than that. And I cannot think of anything more inhumane than the horrors that ICE is inflicting through state terror on our communities."

The government has called it the first domestic terrorism case targeting antifa since President Trump declared the ideology a domestic terrorist threat last year. Experts say the outcome could determine the playbook for how the Trump administration targets alleged left-wing violence.

"Antifa is a domestic terrorist organization that has been allowed to flourish in Democrat-led cities — not under President Trump," read a statement from U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi. "Today's verdict on terrorism charges will not be the last as the Trump administration systematically dismantles Antifa and finally halts their violence on America's streets."

Outside the courthouse, Rueda's attorney Lesa Pamplin said she was "shocked" by the verdict.

"Riot, or being labeled a terrorist organization, I just thought it was all overreach by the government," she said. "I'm disappointed, but the jury has spoken, and we move

forward."

Song faces 20 years to life in prison, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. Hill, Evetts, Morris, Rueda, Batten, Elizabeth Soto, and Ines Soto each face 10-60 years in prison. Sanchez Estrada faces up to 40 years in prison.

Seven defendants pleaded guilty in November to providing material support to terrorists: Nathan Baumann, Joy Gibson, Susan Kent, Rebecca Morgan, Lynette Sharp, John Thomas and Seth Sikes. They face up to 15 years in prison.

Pittman will sentence the defendants — including those who pleaded guilty — in June.

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Juan Vargas speaks to media outside the federal courthouse after the verdict in the Prairieland ICE shooting trial Friday, March 13, 2026, in Fort Worth. Benjamin Song, the gunman in the nonfatal July 4 shooting of a police officer outside Prairieland detention center, was convicted of attempted murder. Other defendants were convicted on lesser charges.

A contentious trial

The underlying political tension in the case became clear during the first attempt at a trial. Pittman declared a mistrial during jury selection Feb. 17 because of what he called defense attorney MarQuetta Clayton's "politically charged" shirt that bore images from the American civil rights movement.

Gross, the Alvarado police lieutenant, was the government's first witness. He testified about responding to a call about a disturbance at the ICE facility that rainy night. He told two people dressed in all black — one with an AR-15-style rifle, one running away — to stop.

In a matter of seconds, someone could be heard yelling "get to the rifles" before a flurry of gunfire sent Gross falling to the ground. He said he was shot once in his neck, and the bullet exited through his back.

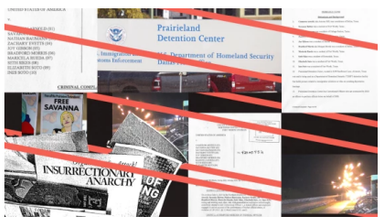
Gross was able to return gunfire before calling for help. He said he spent three to four hours at a hospital in Fort Worth receiving treatment.

"It's a day I'm going to have to live with for the rest of my life," he said.

After questioning from the defense, Gross, a correctional officer in the line of fire and a Texas Ranger testified that Gross may have pulled his gun before the shooter drew his rifle.

Defense attorneys attempted to use this to argue the shooter fired at Gross to defend himself and the person at whom Gross pointed his gun. But Pittman ruled it was legally invalid for Song to claim self-defense or defense of a third party.

Then FBI investigators walked the jury through “zines,” or homemade booklets, pamphlets, posters and other alleged antifa materials they found in the homes and cars of several people on trial. Anti-fascism, anarchy, the abolition of ICE and police, opposition to Israel, noise demonstrations, direct action and animal rights were common messages found throughout the material.



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Some of the evidence showed the defendants’ involvement with the local chapters of leftist or anarchist groups like the Socialist Rifle Association or the Emma Goldman Book Club. Prosecutors later argued these organizations were above-ground fronts for the antifa cell, and members were recruited from these groups' gatherings.

Investigators also recovered a slew of AR-style rifles, body armor and tactical medical kits among the defendants’ belongings.

The jury heard several perspectives about the night of the shooting and the events surrounding it: a recap of Morris’ interviews with law enforcement after her arrest and direct testimony from cooperating defendants Sharp, Sikes, Kent, Thomas and Baumann.

All told law enforcement and the government that they didn't expect violence the night of July 4 — just a noise demonstration with fireworks. Morris told investigators she suspected Song used others present at Prairieland as a distraction so he could pull off his "fantasy" and run away.

The cooperating defendants' answers varied on whether a "North Texas antifa cell" existed. Some testified the people in their circles never seriously referred to themselves as members of antifa. Others named specific defendants they considered "antifa."

Defense attorneys later sparred with Kyle Shideler, the prosecution's controversial antifa expert, over his testimony that the defendants' actions aligned closely with

prosecutors called a handbook on antifa beliefs authored by Mark Bray.

Shideler authored a memo and testified in Congress about how the Trump administration can crack down on far-left extremists. He also said in court he made suggestions when the government was crafting his indictment.

The prosecution wrapped up its case during closing arguments by describing Song as a "ringleader" who worked with his politically-aligned inner circle to coordinate an ambush at Prairieland, escape and hide any physical or digital evidence.

The defense ultimately didn't put forward their evidence or witnesses. They closed by asking jurors to consider each defendant and their charges independently of the others and not let politics influence their verdict.

Cody Cofer, Hill's attorney, said in a statement he and his team were thankful the jury saw through the government's "fear mongering Antifa 'ambush' narrative."

"As we move into the sentencing phase of the case, it is fortunate that the judge was able to see a more complete picture than what the Government has painted in the indictment and press releases," Cofer wrote. "We still have First Amendment and sufficiency of the evidence issues to address on appeal."

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